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Viewing cable 08MOSCOW2319, TFGGO1: RUSSIA-SOUTH OSSETIA SITREP 2 AUGUST 9

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Discussing cables

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08MOSCOW2319	2008-08-09 08:56	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Moscow

Appears in these articles:

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 002319

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/09/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [GG](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: TFGGO1: RUSSIA-SOUTH OSSETIA SITREP 2 AUGUST 9

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Eric S. Rubin. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. U.S. demarche will be delivered to the

Russian MFA at 1400 Moscow time (0600 EDT). The Russian government continues to characterize its actions as "peace enforcement," with Russian media claiming that troops have reached Tskhinvali's outskirts. Officials emphasize they have a responsibility to protect the local populace and stress that they will take all necessary actions to deal with the humanitarian situation. Local press has been covering the conflict extensively, showing convoys of Russian tanks, and interviews with persons who have fled their homes in South Ossetia for North Ossetia. Russia's political parties and populace have acclaimed Russia's actions, with the Communists and nationalist Zhirinovskiy pressing for a harder line. The lackluster performance of Medvedev has raised questions, but the fact Putin has not returned from Beijing and is shown talking to Olympic athletes indicate he is content to let Medvedev handle the situation (for public consumption, at least). Some commentators are questioning whether the U.S. gave Georgia the go-ahead, and say the GOR is awaiting the U.S. reaction. End summary.

DFM Karasin Not Available

¶2. (C) MFA informed Embassy Moscow that DFM Karasin was not available to meet with Charge today. The French Embassy got the same message this morning when it requested an appointment to deliver an EU demarche paralleling ours. Acting DCM will deliver our demarche to MFA at the directorate level at 14:00 Moscow time.

Medvedev Steps Forward, Hesitantly

¶3. (SBU) A pale and hesitant Medvedev, with none of the bravado of Putin, was pushed forward into the limelight on Saturday morning, with televised coverage of his opening remarks following a meeting with Defense Minister Serdyukov and the Chief of the General Staff Makarov. Medvedev reiterated to the military leadership that the Russian peacekeepers and additional units were entrusted with bringing the Georgian side to peace, with the responsibility for protecting the local population. Medvedev then met with officials from the Ministry for Emergency Services, as well as Health and Social Services, to underscore that Russia would take all steps necessary to deal with the difficult humanitarian situation that had been brought out by Georgian military actions. Reiterating that it was Russia's obligation to resolve the crisis situation and assist the civilians, Medvedev entrusted the Russian officials with overseeing the complex of issues associated with the "humanitarian response." Press reports note the provision of a mobile hospital facilities among the assistance, with a hot-line established for families to find out information about friends and relatives in the conflict area.

¶4. (C) Medvedev's performance has been lackluster, with potential implications for his longevity in office. That said, we do not see divisions in the leadership, with prominent foreign policy experts reinforcing to us the consensus that undergirds Russia's policy towards Georgia. The fact that Putin has not come rushing home from Beijing to help manage the crisis in Moscow reflects his confidence that the policy course is not in doubt. Medvedev's efforts to frame Russian actions in legal terms, as an obligation to assist Russian peacekeepers, who are present in the conflict zone under international agreement, reflects his lawyerly bent and perhaps his inclination to keep this conflict focused on the restoration of status quo ante.

¶5. (C) xxxxx said the key question the GOR was trying to determine was whether the U.S. had given Saakashvili the go-ahead. The GOR had expected the U.S. to again convince Georgia to pull back and when that didn't happen, it raised the question whether the U.S. had allowed Georgia to go ahead. The GOR was questioning whether this was a first step in the U.S.'s attempt to isolate or contain Russia, and were waiting for America's reaction and intentions.

Russia's Conception of "Status Quo Ante?"

¶6. (SBU) In a phone call with German President Merkel, President Medvedev insisted that returning to the status quo ante would entail Georgian troops returning to their "initial positions." This likely supports Foreign Minister Lavrov's emphasis on a Georgian withdrawal from the current zone of conflict, a point he made in numerous calls with foreign counterparts. What remains unclear is whether a return to "initial positions" refers to the positioning of Georgian forces immediately before the outbreak of violence on Thursday, or an adherence to the terms of the 1994 Cease-fire Agreement. Although Russian officials have yet to cite the 1994 Agreement as a condition for status quo ante, Medvedev has announced the need for a legally binding, "non-use of force" agreement. Russia has repeatedly called on Georgia to sign such an agreement.

¶7. (C) The status quo ante could become a moot point if Russia throws its support behind South Ossetian independence. While the Kremlin and the Government have largely stayed silent on recognizing South Ossetia's independence, Federation Council Speaker Mironov said the FC would examine this issue in the near future. We believe Mironov's comments are parliamentary bluster.

President Medvedev Orders Aid to Fleeing South Ossetians

¶8. (U) Russians remain fixated with the scope of Georgian-inflicted casualties. Hourly news bulletins on all channels are showing tearful refugees telling tales of terror and flight. On August 8, head of the South Ossetia information department in the Joint Control Commission (JCC) told Interfax that the Georgians shot at residential areas and a hospital. He said, "All business and organizations are on fire: schools, the university, the Culture Ministry, the parliament. The peacekeeper's city has been destroyed." South Ossetia leader Eduard Kokoity estimated the number of dead at 1,400. Vice Premier Sergey Sobyenin announced that Russia has accepted more than 30,000 refugees from South Ossetia. South Ossetia's entire population is estimated at 70,000 people. UNHCR tells us it continues to closely follow the situation in South Ossetia. The Federal Migration Service had told their office to expect thousands of refugees and IDPs, but she questioned the 30,000 figure reported in the Russian media.

¶9. (U) On August 9, President Medvedev ordered the Emergency Situations Ministry, the Health and Social Development Ministry, and the Federal Migration Service to address the "very complicated humanitarian problems have arisen, which we need to address in line with our mandate and simply in line with the duty that our state has." Medvedev stressed that, "the people responsible for this humanitarian disaster need to be held liable for what they have done, considering, among other, the international legal aspect of this problem." Emergency Situations Ministry spokeswoman Irina Andrianova said that 19 provisional centers for the refugees are operating in North Ossetia and a Ministry airmobile hospital has been deployed to the region. News reports also said that most South Ossetians are staying with relatives in North Ossetia, and that Russia's Rostov region is preparing to accommodate thousands of South Ossetians.

Criminal Case Opened to Investigation Peacekeeper Losses

¶10. (U) By August 9 midday, Russian news agencies reported 15 Russian peacekeepers had been killed and over 50 were injured. The spokesman of Russia's Office of the Chief Military Prosecutor announced the launch of a criminal investigation into the peacekeeper's deaths, comprised of 30 investigators and headed by a deputy chief military prosecutor.
Rubin